

THE TRANSIT EXPEDITION.

ARRIVAL AT BAHIA OF THE OBSERVATION PARTY.

DESCRIPTION OF THE TOWN AND ITS SURROUNDINGS—ITS POPULATION, SITUATION, AND COMMERCE—THE SHOW PLACES OF THE CITY.

From Our Own Correspondent.

BAHIA, Brazil, Tuesday, July 14, 1874.

As the Transit-of-Venus parties have arrived at this place on their journey southward, it has occurred to me that perhaps your readers might like a description of what I have seen in my rambles about the city.

Bahia, or San Salvador de Bahia, stands on the western shore of the Bahia de Todos os Santos, (the Bay of All Saints,) which, with the exception of Rio Janeiro, is by far the finest harbor on the eastern coast of South America. The bay extends twenty-eight miles from south to north, and twenty from east to west. The large island of Itaparica divides the entrance into two channels, the eastern of which is about five miles wide, and is used by large vessels; while the western, called Barra Falsa, is but two miles wide, and, owing to its shallowness, can only be navigated by small craft. The best anchorage is just abreast of the city, and the view from a vessel in that position is very fine. To the west, at a distance of six or seven miles, lie the hills of Itaparica, clothed in all the magnificence of tropical verdure; northward, as far as the eye can reach, extend the waters of the bay; eastward lies the city, reaching from Monserrat Point, where it seems to be arrested by the waters of the bay, to the light-house on Cape San Antonio, where the southern horizon is bounded by the waves of the Atlantic. The buildings commence at the water's edge, clamber up a precipitous cliff more than two hundred feet high which faces the bay, and extend beyond the ridge to a distance which the eye is unable to determine. This cliff divides the city into two parts—the lower and the upper. The lower city, although quite narrow, contains all the business offices, stores, and warehouses for inland produce and foreign goods. It is nearly four miles long, having the arsenal and imperial dock-yards at one extremity, and the ship-yards of Itapagipe at the other. A very steep ascent leads to the upper city, where are the residences of the better classes, together with most of the churches and public buildings. This part of the town is about six miles in length, but nowhere very wide. The total population of the city is estimated at 225,000 souls.

On our way from the ship to the shore in a small boat we passed Fort do Mar, which stands about a quarter of a mile from the Custom-house, and it recalled the memories of ten years ago. In October, 1864, the rebel steamer Florida and the United States sloop-of-war Wachusett lay here, both of them inside the fort. It was a neutral port, and by all the laws of nations the Florida was safe from attack. On the other hand, she was doing incalculable damage to our shipping, and it might be long before she came within reach of one of our men-of-war again. What was to be done? The brave Collins, who commanded the Wachusett, cut the knot by taking the law into his own hands. His course may have been wrong, but it was effectual. At 3 o'clock on the morning of Oct. 7 he ran his ship alongside the Florida, boarded her, and towed her in triumph from the harbor, in spite of the booming guns of Fort do Mar.

But while I was musing on this incident, our boat had not been standing still. She was now almost at the shore, and I was aroused to consciousness of the present by the shouts of the boatmen. We were close to the landing place, in the midst of a crowd of small craft manned by the most motley and picturesque crews imaginable. Although jet black skins seemed to predominate among them, they were of every hue save white, and were shouting and gesticulating in the most excited manner. With a little patience and some crowding, we managed to reach the landing-stairs and step ashore. The sight which met our eyes on the quay was strange and interesting. The whole place was covered with goods, some being landed and some being shipped, but neither a horse nor a cart was to be seen. Everything was done by men—negroes imported from Africa to act as beasts of burden during the old slave-trading days, which are now fortunately over. And such negroes! Nothing like them is ever seen in the United States. They were dressed in blouses and pantaloons of the coarsest tow; without shirts, shoes, or hats; and every face, whether of man or woman, was indelibly scored with the mark of the tribe to which its owner belonged, as has been the custom in Africa for ages past. Their strength and dexterity in handling burdens are remarkable. When a load can be managed by one man—that is, when it does not exceed one or two hundred pounds—they place it on a little cushion on their heads, and trot away with it. I say *trot* advisedly, because their gait is neither a walk nor a run, but literally a trot. Doing this from childhood, their figures are as straight as an arrow. Heavy weights are slung from a pole of suitable strength, which is carried on the shoulders of so many men as may be necessary; and as they trot along with it they give vent to a series of howls, which enable them to keep step with each other.

The stores and places of business are very much like those which may be seen in Italy and Sicily. They are generally three or four stories high, and are built of thin flat bricks, held together by a most disproportionate quantity of mortar. Timber, being expensive, is employed as little as possible. The outsides of the buildings are covered with stucco, sometimes finished in a very ornamental manner, and always painted white, or at least whitewashed. The fronts consist almost wholly of doors, separated from each other by masonry pillars, which support the upper stories, and as these doors stand open during business hours, everything contained in the stores is visible from the street. This obviates the necessity for show-windows, and they are almost unknown. There are many narrow and filthy lanes where the stench is horrible, but the principal business streets are neither narrower, dirtier, nor more crooked than those in the old part of Boston.

We wanted to go to Bom Fim, at the north-eastern extremity of the city, nearly three miles from the landing place, and I own to a slight feeling of surprise when I was told that the readiest way of getting there was by means of the street cars! When we got into them they looked quite familiar, and well they might, for they were built by Stephenson, of New-York. There were also some built at Birkenhead, in England. Each of them had a conductor and driver, as usual, but the horses were replaced by mules. By the way, horses are exceedingly scarce in Bahia, and what few there are seem to be kept mostly for riding. Mules and donkeys are somewhat more plenty, but even they are rarely seen. When employed they usually carry their loads on their backs, but occasionally they are attached to a rude kind of cart. But to return to the street cars. The fare in them for the three miles which we wished to ride was three hundred réis for each individual—apparently a large sum—but in reality only fifteen cents. The money unit here is the rei, two thousand of which make but a single dollar. The result of this is that a fellow with a few dollars in his pocket is apt to think himself a millionaire until he comes to buy something, when he is soon undeceived. Everything except fruit is frightfully dear, even when judged by American standards.

The car in which we rode was full, but, excepting our own party, I doubt if it contained a person of pure white blood. Every one who can muster the necessary three hundred réis seems to ride, and there were quite as many dirty people as are generally found in some of the street cars in New-York. Notwithstanding this, in one respect the cars are much more comfortable than our own. No person is permitted to bring a basket or bundle into them unless it is small enough to go under the seats. No baggage of any kind is allowed on the platforms. That this rule is strictly enforced we learned to our cost. We wished to take some photographs of such objects as might seem of sufficient interest, and we had our apparatus with us in a market basket, not any larger than is commonly seen in the street cars of New-York, but the conductor refused to let us take it on board. We argued the point in vain. He said they ran baggage cars to carry such things, and they could not be permitted on a passenger car.

After leaving the business centre of the city,

we rode through a street not more than twelve or fourteen feet wide, the odors in which by no means resembled those of Araby the blest; but we were soon through it, and then there was a long stretch of road with pleasant-looking houses, and an occasional church, on one side, and a charming view of the harbor on the other. After that we struck inland again, and presently we passed the railroad station. This has a pretty flower garden in front, and the building itself, which is large and spacious, looks as if it had been designed by English engineers. It is the terminus of the road from Bahia to Pernambuco. We were now in the suburbs of the city, and another half mile among groves of mango, jaca, and cocoanut trees, brought us to the foot of the hill on which stands the church of Bom Fim. There we left the cars and walked up the hill.

The church of Bom Fim is a white stuccoed building, of moderate size, with two square towers on its front. Although making no pretensions to magnificence, it is by far the most celebrated and most ecclesiastical edifice in Bahia. This is due to the fact that it possesses, as one of the chief ornaments of its high altar, a crucifix which the faithful believe to be endowed with miraculous powers. Whenever they are beset by extreme danger, whether by land or by sea, and whenever they are suffering from extreme disease, they pray to it with perfect confidence that relief will be vouchsafed. If they are delivered they send a votive offering to the church, and the room containing these offerings presents a sight which, to foreign eyes, is truly remarkable. From the walls and ceiling are suspended wax casts of nearly every part of the human body, exhibiting all sorts of diseases and ailments, some of which seemed to me scarcely proper objects for the public gaze. Many of the so-called miraculous deliverances from shipwreck and other perils are commemorated by paintings or drawings; and in one case where a small coasting vessel seems to have barely escaped destruction by collision with a large frigate, during a dark and stormy night, the whole scene is perpetuated by a model. In addition to these votive offerings, the only objects of interest about the church are the frescoes on its ceiling and a few paintings by some of the lesser of the old masters.

About an eighth of a mile south-west of the church, and on the very summit of the hill, stands the Portuguese Hospital, said to be the finest building in the city. It is two stories high, covered with white stucco, as usual, and is intended to accommodate twenty or thirty patients, although when we visited it there were not more than half a dozen. The perfect cleanliness and order of everything about the institution was notable, and reflects great credit upon the society of Portuguese merchants who manage it, and by whose voluntary contributions it is maintained. We had been told that the best views of the city and bay were to be had from here, and when we looked out from the second-story windows we were not disappointed. The luxuriant tropical foliage in the foreground, the harbor with its shipping spread out at our feet, the clustering white buildings of the city, and the glimpse of the Atlantic in the distance, all served to produce a picture of surpassing loveliness.

On leaving the hill, one of our party suggested that, as it was past noon, a little refreshment would be agreeable. This met with general approval, and as there were no saloons near, we looked around for one of the fruit peddlers so common here. These are negro women, who carry their wares in trays on their heads. We soon found one, from whom we bought some navel oranges and sapoties, (accent on the last syllable.) As these fruits are unknown in the United States, perhaps it will be well to describe them. The navel orange is from four to five inches in diameter, has a thick skin, and is very sweet. The seeds, instead of being in the centre as usual, are contained in a cell about three-quarters of an inch in diameter, situated on the side opposite the stem, where it produces an umbilicated swelling, from which the fruit takes its name. The sapotie resembles a large plum in size and shape, but it contains two small seeds in its centre, and has a skin like that of a peach, except that it is of a dirty cinnamon color. Its taste is sweetish and agreeable, although unlike that of any of our Northern fruits. Sapoties and oranges are sold at the same price—two cents each—and our refreshments cost us the nominal sum of six cents per head. After disposing of them we sauntered past a large cocoanut grove, and on to the extremity of the point where stands the suburb of Itapagipe. It possesses some ship-yards, but little seemed to be doing in them, so, after looking around for a few minutes, we got into the cars and returned to the centre of the city.

I have already said that the lower city stands on a narrow strip of low land, and the upper on the summit of the cliffs two or three hundred feet above. When I was here eight years ago the only mode of access from one to the other was through the precipitous streets, which wind in zig-zag lines along the face of the cliff. The ascent on foot during a hot Summer day was very fatiguing, but for two dumps (about four cents) a person could be carried up in a cadeira, which is a kind of sedan chair, prettily ornamented, and covered by a silken canopy to shade the occupant from the sun. Each of the chairs was attached to a long pole carried on the shoulders of two negroes, and although I was often compelled to use them, I never did so without an uncomfortable feeling of degrading my fellow-men. The cadeiras still exist, but their day is over. They have been superseded by a steam elevator, which carries its passengers 250 feet straight up the face of the cliff, far more rapidly and far more comfortably than ever it was done by the poor black men. We ascended in it, and on reaching its summit found ourselves at the terminus of a street railway leading to Fort San Antonio, at the south-western extremity of the city. Walking by its track for a quarter of a mile brought us to the Hotel Figueiredo, where we got a substantial lunch.

Later in the afternoon we walked out to the public garden. At the entrance is a small grove of fine old mango trees, beyond which lies a terrace, tastefully ornamented with statuary, and commanding a magnificent view of the harbor. Here the populace assembles on Sundays and holidays to promenade and listen to music discoursed by military bands. Northward of the terrace is a large marble monument and an avenue of palms and other graceful tropical trees. There is also a pretty extensive aviary containing birds of brilliant and striking plumage, and finally, a large collection of air-growing plants suspended in wire baskets. The whole park is very prettily arranged, and presents an agreeable contrast to the close and narrow streets of the city.

About 7 o'clock we dined with a friend, and then spent the remainder of the evening at the theatre. It is situated on a large open space, nearly opposite the Hotel Figueiredo, and although by no means equal to our finest opera-houses, is still a more than ordinarily good building of its class. The interior is arranged in the European style, with boxes from the pit to the ceiling, and is capable of seating about six hundred persons. It is amply provided with dressing-rooms, smoking-saloons, and a spacious balcony outside, which is very much frequented between the acts during hot sultry evenings. Nearly every year some opera troupe comes over from Europe and sings here for a few weeks. We saw rather a miscellaneous performance. First, there was a play, which I failed to appreciate on account of its being given in the Portuguese language, but it must have been something tremendous, for the actors threw themselves after the stage in the most reckless manner. After that there were some selections from "Sonnambula," Patti's laughing song, and another vocal piece, all given by Mmc. Eva Carls, who really sang very well. Finally, there was some instrumental music, notable among which was a violin solo by the leader of the orchestra. It was almost midnight when the performance ended.

On another day we explored the south-western suburbs, in which are situated the residences of the élite of the city. The houses here are mostly two stories high, and in many instances, their fronts, instead of being finished in white stucco, are faced with glazed tiles, ornamented with colored designs. Except in the most densely populated districts, all dwellings with any pretension to elegance are set a little back from the street, and the intervening space is occupied by a flower garden. The effect is admirable. I happened to see a house in course of erection, and it furnished a curious commentary on the heat of the climate. From the scaffolding about it was suspended a wall of mats, to shade the workmen from the sun. Probably for the same reason the streets are comparatively narrow, generally only about thirty feet wide, and are bordered with trees, which give them a pleasant appearance. A sense of space is imparted by frequent open squares of greater or less extent. In the suburbs the streets are not paved, but in the heart of the city it is otherwise. There immense sums have been spent on the pavements, not so much with a view of making the streets passable for wheeled vehicles as to prevent them being washed away by the rush of waters down the hill-sides after the heavy tropical rains. The city is built on very uneven ground, and little or no grading seems to have been done. Consequently, many of the streets are so steep that without good pavement they could not endure a single storm. Yet, this steepness has its advantages. It insures excellent drainage and a thorough cleansing of the streets by every shower, without which the filthiness of some parts of the city would rival that of the Augean stables, and disease would abound. As it is, Bahia is the healthiest city on the eastern coast of South America.